

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 AID-05 /057 W

-----109329 212007Z /45

O R 211800Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7366

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 1099

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, EC

SUBJECT: ELECTION LAW KILLS BUCARAM CANDIDACY

REF: (A) QUITO 1027; (B) QUITO 1078; (C) QUITO 1081

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: AS WIDELY RUMORED AND EXPECTED (SEE REFTELS) THE GOE ELECTIONS LAW RELEASED FEBRUARY 20 HAS DISQUALIFIED THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY OF POPULIST FRONT RUNNER ASSAD BUCARAM. PROTESTS AR EXPECTED BUT IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT THEY WILL BE KEPT UNDER CONTROL AND IMPERIL NEITHER THE STABILITY OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT NOR THE UPCOMING RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. THE REMOVAL OF BUCARAM FROM PRESIDENTIAL CONTENTION CHANGES THE POLITICAL EQUATION AS SPECULATION ABOUT CFP REACTION AND THE DIRECTION OF BUCARAM'S SUPPORTERS INCREASES. THE EXCLUSION OF BUCARAM, WHILE LIMITING DEMOCRATIC CHOICE, ALL BUT GUARANTEES THE SUCCESSFUL CARRYING OUT OF THE RETORNO PROCESS THIS YEAR. END SUMMARY.

2. AS EXPECTED, THE ELECTIONS LAW ISSUED BY THE GOE

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ON FEBRUARY 20, PUT THE LEGAL BLOCKS TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRATIONS OF ASSAD BUCARAM, LEADER OF THE CONCENTRATION OF POPULAR FORCES (CFP). THE DISQUALIFYING PROVISION CAME IN A TRANSITORY ADDENDUM TO THE ELECTIONS LAW WHICH STATES THAT AS THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF HE ARMED FORCES, THE PRESIDENT SHOULD ALSO FILL THE SAME QUALIFICATIONS AS A MILITARY OFFICER OF BEING THE OFFSPRING OF AT LEAST

ONE NATIVE-BORN ECUADOREAN PARENT. (BUCARAM'S PARENTS WERE BORN IN LEBANON). THE REASONS FOR THE OPPOSITION OF THE MILITARY AND OTHER GROUPS TO BUCARAM'S CANDIDACY HAVE BEEN DETAILED IN EARLIER REPORTING. IT SUFFICES HERE TO SAY THAT THE MILITARY AS AN INSTITUTION FELT THREATENED BY THE PROSPECT OF A BUCARAM PRESIDENCY. GIVEN THE REAL --- ALBEIT DIMINISHING --- POSSIBILITY OF A BUCARAM TRIUMPH IN THE JULY 16 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, AND HIS UNACCEPTABILITY TO THE MILITARY, AND IN THE EVENT HE WAS PREVENTED FROM RUNNING BY A LEGAL TECHNICALITY SPECIFICALLY AIMED AT HIM.

3. THE ELECTION LAW ALSO EXCLUDED THE ANNOUNCED CANDIDACY OF CARLOS JULIO AROSEMENA BY DISQUALIFYING FORMER PRESIDENTS FROM RUNNING. THE SAME PROVISION ALSO QUASHED THE LAST VELASQUISTA HOPES OF ENTICING VELASCO IBARRA TO RETURN FROM HIS SELF-IMPOSED EXILE IN BUENOS AIRES AND MAKE A LAST STAB AT THE PRESIDENCY. ALSO, BY CONFIRMING THAT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES MUST BE SUPPORTED BY A RECOGNIZED POLITICAL PARTY AND REQUIRING THAT PARTIES HERETOFORE UNRECOGNIZED WOULD HAVE TO OBTAIN ABOUT 25,000 SIGNATURES, THE ELECTION LAW SLOWED DOWN THE CANDIDACIES OF RODRIGO BORJA OF IZQUIERDA DEMOCRATICA AND ABDON CALDERON OF THE ALFARISTA REVOLUTIONARY FRONT, BOTH OF WHOSE PARTIES ARE CURRENTLY UNREGISTERED.

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4. WHILE ANGRILY DENOUNCING THE DECISION, BUCARAM HAS NOT INDICATED HIS IMMEDIATE STRATEGY. HE AND HIS PARTY CAN RESPOND IN SEVERAL ALTERNATIVE WAYS:

(A) FIRST, THEY CAN DO NOTHING AND OFFER NO PRESIDENTIAL/ VICE-PRESIDENTIAL TICKET;

(B) SECOND, THEY CAN ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE THEIR ADHERENTS INTO DEMONSTRATIONS WITH THE INTENT OF PRESSURING THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT INTO REVERSING ITS DECISION OR OF BRINGING DOWN THE GOE.

(C) THIRD, THE CFP CAN NAME AN ALTERNATE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ON ITS OWN TICKET;

(D) FOURTH, THE PARTY CAN LOOK FOR THE BEST ARRANGEMENT IT CAN MAKE WITH OTHER POLITICAL GROUPS. THIS SHOULD INCLUDE FORMAL ALLIANCES, PERHAPS WITH THE NOMINATION OF A CFP PERSONAGE AS THE VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE OF A COALITION WITH OTHER PARTIES.

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USIE-00 INRE-00 AID-05 /057 W
-----109337 212008Z /45

O R 211800Z FEB 78
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5. PUBLIC PROTESTS CAN PROBABLY BE EXPECTED, SOME SPONTANEOUS AS WELL AS THOSE ORGANIZED BY THE CFP. ALTHOUGH THESE COULD CONCEIVABLY RESULT IN INADVERTENT VIOLENCE THAT COULD FEED ON ITSELF TO CREATE A MAJOR CRISIS, WE BELIEVE THAT SUCH DEMONSTRATIONS CAN BE KEPT WITHIN BOUNDS. IN PAST SPECULATION ABOUT LIKELY REACTION IN CASE THE GOE MOVED AGAINST HIM, BUCARAM HAS NEVER INDICATED HIS WISH TO BRING THE POLITICAL TEMPLE CRASHING DOWN ON HIS HEAD. WE BELIEVE THE CFP WILL CHOOSE TO ORCHESTRATE DEMONSTRATIONS AS A MEASURED RESPONSE TO ILLUSTRATE STRONG PUBLIC DISCONTENT WITH BUCARAM'S EXCLUSION FROM THE PROCESS.

6. ALSO, BECAUSE OF THE VERY NATURE OF BUCARAM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FOLLOWING, SPONTANEOUS DEMONSTRATIONS ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE SUSTAINED LONG AGAINST THE GOE'S CERTAIN FIRM RESPONSE. BUCARAM'S RHETORIC IS RESPONSIVE TO THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE COUNTRY'S LOWER CLASSES, BUT HIS LEADERSHIP DOES NOT CREATE VIOLENT ATTACHMENTS AND PASSIONATE LOYALTIES. ALTHOUGH HIS CONSTITUENCY WILL
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FEEL GREAT DISENCHANTMENT, IT IS NOT LIKELY TO REACT IN A WAY THAT WILL SIGNIFICANTLY THREATEN THE STABILITY OF THE GOE OR THE OUTCOME OF ITS EFFORTS TO RETURN ECUADOR TO CIVILIAN RULE.

7. THE MAJOR BENEFICIARY OF BUCARAM'S DISQUALIFICATION IS LIBERAL CANDIDATE FRANCISCO HUERTA, WHO IS CONSIDERED SECOND ONLY TO BUCARAM AS A VOTE-GETTER IN THE GUAYAQUIL SLUMS WHICH PROVIDES UP TO 10 PERCENT OF THE NATIONAL VOTE. EVEN IF CFP GOES AHEAD WITH AN ALTERNATE CANDIDATE, HUERTA SHOULD AT LEAST BE ABLE TO GRAB A SIZEABLE SHARE OF THAT VOTE WITH CFP WITH BUCARAM OFF THE BALLOT. SHOULD THE CFP CHOOSE TO MAKE A DEAL WITH HUERTA (AS IT HAS IN THE PAST), THAT SUPPORT WILL MAKE HIM THE HEAVY FAVORITE. A COALITION BEHIND RODRIGO BORJA'S CANDIDACY WOULD MAKE HIM A FORMIDABLE CONTENDER. ON THE OTHER HAND, A CFP CANDIDATE LIKE JAIME ROLDOS, STRONGLY ENDORSED BY AND IDENTIFIED WITH BUCARAM MIGHT STILL WIN ENOUGH VOTES TO GET INTO THE RUN-OFF ELECTION. AT THIS POINT, HOWEVER, SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN APPEARS TO BE THE STRONGEST CANDIDATE ON THE FIRST BALLOT, BUT HUERTA WOULD SEEM TO BE A VERY STRONG CONTENDER, ESPECIALLY IN THE RUN-OFF.

8. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE DECISION TO BLOCK BUCARAM SEEMS RATHER SHABBY IN THE LIGHT OF FAIR PLAY AND DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES, ITS POSITIVE BENEFITS CANNOT BE UNDERESTIMATED. FOREMOST AMONG WHICH IS THE FACT THAT IT HAS JUST ABOUT INSURED THAT A CIVILIAN, CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT WILL REPLACE THE MILITARY REGIME IN 6-7 MONTHS. THOSE AMONG THE MILITARY WHO PUSHED HARDEST FOR BUCARAM'S EXCLUSION, WERE ALSO THOSE WHOSE DEVOTION TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT WAS THE MOST SINCERE. BY REMOVING BUCARAM, THEY ALSO REMOVED THE LAST VISIBLE PRETEXT FOR SUBSEQUENT MILITARY

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ADVENTURISM WHICH MIGHT HAVE DISRUPTED THE RETORNO PROCESS OR ACTED SUBSEQUENTLY AGAINST A BUCARAM GOVERNMENT. MEANWHILE, IN SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN, HUERTA, BORJA, AND AN EXPECTED FAR LEFT CANDIDATE, ECUADOREANS WILL HAVE NOT ONLY A BROAD IDEOLOGICAL SELECTION BUT WILL HAVE SOME ATTRACTIVE PERSONAL ALTERNATIVES.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION LAW, ELECTION CANDIDATES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978QUITO01099
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780078-0703
Format: TEL
From: QUITO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780232/aaaabbcstel
Line Count: 217
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: add5b7d2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 QUITO 1027, 78 QUITO 1078, 78 QUITO 1081
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3535235
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ELECTION LAW KILLS BUCARAM CANDIDACY
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, EC, (BUCARAM, ASSAD)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/add5b7d2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014